

**THESIS TITLE: A THEORY OF NATO EXPANSION. BLOSSOMING, WANING OR FADING:
ASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF FURTHER ALLIANCE ENLARGEMENT**

ABSTRACT

This research work aims at clarifying what are the real reasons behind NATO enlargement. I argue that the prevailing theory of Alliance expansion, based on the conviction that enlargement promotes security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, that it elicits democratisation of the aspiring members and that it enhances Alliance's effectiveness and cohesion is inaccurate, and that other reasons better explain the phenomenon.

This research led to the formulation of a new theory of NATO expansion, which defends that enlargement was instrumental in achieving specific US's domestic political objectives, it was and is based on the continuous vision of Russia as threat and main enemy, and represents the rational choice of states that see in the Alliance the possibility to free-ride on defence provisions of stronger Allies.

The research also identifies possible consequences of a continuous open door policy, to include the risk of open confrontation with Russia. Finally, I suggest that enlargement should stop and that NATO and Russia should together focus on building a new, sustainable security architecture for Europe.

Palavras Chave: NATO Expansion, Neorealism, Russia, Democratisation, Dividing Lines, Free-Riding, Cohesion, Rational Choice, Alliance Theory and Geopolitics.